

Illness, starvation, injury marked pioneer's life

One in a series celebrating the sesquicentennial of the Mormon pioneers' entry into Utah. The weekly articles will consist of excerpts from journals, diaries or other written records left by the early settlers of Utah Territory.

By Twila Van Leer
Deseret News staff writer

(Robert Gardner Jr. joined the LDS Church in 1845 in Canada. He was in one of the first pioneer companies, reaching Salt Lake Valley in fall 1847. His story of the first winter, and subsequent adventures, is typical for the time. He later went to southern Utah and shared in the pioneering of Dixie.)

On arriving in the valley, he wrote: My wagon was badly broken and my team nearly given out. I, myself, was given out. We took a look over the valley and there was not a house to be seen, nor anything else in sight to give us welcome, but we were glad to

see a resting place and felt to thank God for the sight.

We then drove down to the camping place, afterward called the old Fort

... I unyoked my oxen and sat down on my broken wagon tongue, and said I could not go another day's journey. The rest of the family were nearly as bad off as I, though not quite, for they

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

had not had so much sickness in their families as I had. However, that was a happy day for all of us. We knew that this was a place where we could worship God according to the dictates of our conscience, and mobs would not come, at least for awhile. . . . This first winter was very mild. There was

hardly any snow in the Valley and very little in the mountains. There was no rain either and the sun shone all winter. Archie (his brother, Archibald) and I sowed six acres of wheat and moved camp six miles south of Salt Lake City on the Mill Creek. We moved our sawmill and rebuilt it on that stream and then commenced to saw lumber and build houses. . . . By this time provisions were getting very scarce and we were anxious to get in an early crop. We were not acquainted with the nature of the country and thought it a good time to plant all our garden seeds right after a heavy rain in the mud of the clay land. They did not come up. Part of our corn we treated the same way.

The land was covered with black crickets and they picked our corn off as it came up. This was very discouraging, one thousand miles from any supplies. We took in one of

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ROBERT GARDNER
Born March 12, 1845
Died Nov. 1, 1911

Robert Gardner

GARDNER

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the pioneers whom we found without any provisions, and our own provisions fell short. We went from half rations to quarter rations and helped it out with weeds and what I could kill with my gun. I shot hawks, crows, snipes, ducks, cranes, wolves and we also ate this-
tle, roots, raw hides, etc. I had no cow for I had killed the only one I had the fall before. So there was no milk either. I took the hide of my cow and scalded it and boiled it and we ate that, and believe me, it was tough.

I have known my wife, Jane, to pick wild onions and violets as they first came up on the hillsides for hours at a time and then take them home and boil them and thicken them with a rich gravy made of two spoons full of corn meal. A small plate of this would make a meal for my wife and I and our three children. We were blessed though, even if we were short of rations, and our children never cried for bread. That was a thing I often dreaded — that the time might come when my children might cry for bread and I might not have any to give them.

At last when everything in the shape of eatables were about at an end I took my rifle, pistols, beaknife and hatchet and started for the mountains. I . . . went up Mill Creek Canyon, an unexplored place. There was nothing but bear trails. I caught sight of the face of a bear looking from behind a low bushy pine tree at me. I being a stranger, I thought he might feel friendly towards me and come and meet me. I wanted him to do this, for I wanted to make a dead shot. Under other circumstances, I might not have been so anxious for his friendship, but I thought of my hungry children at home. I could defend my life with my rifle and I did not want to make a random shot at his nose or hind legs. But he did not wish to entertain strangers and left in a hurry. I was brave then, seeing him run, and I took after him, but we never met again. I followed him up the mountain about a quarter of a mile and for the first time in my life when in good health, I was given out. It was through weakness because of lack of food. I could go no further and concluded that I was in a poor fix to hunt bear, so I started to come back, but could not walk over ten steps until I had to stop and rest. I shook all over with pure weakness, so I made my way home the best I could without my bear.

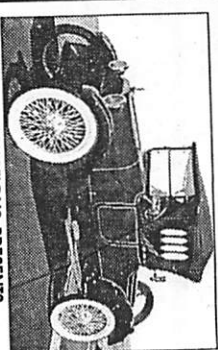
We went up to our patch of winter wheat to see if the crickets had left any of it. I found some that had not been watered on high spots and it was getting ripe, so I picked a few bundles and brought them home, six miles away, and beat some out, cleaned it and had some boiling in a short time. That was one of our first good times.

I used to think in those times that if I ever got any grain that had grown in that Valley I would be so thankful that I would make an offering of it to the Lord. But when I got that wheat in the pot I watched it closely until it began to get soft, then I got some in a bowl and ate it. I thought it was the sweetest thing I had ever tasted and forgot all about the Lord until I had finished. Well, I was thankful anyway, even if I did forget to make an offering of it. From that time on we always had something to eat.

(In 1856, Robert had another significant event in his life.) I had broken in one yoke of the young steers and in the winter time I went to the mountain on foot to slide some dry timber for fire wood. The snow was very deep and the weather very cold. When I reached the sliding place I was not aware that men had gone in head of me. I had climbed about a quarter of the way up the slide and I was met by a log which was running like an arrow and it struck my right leg below the knee, peeling off all the flesh clear to the bone, about four by six inches. On account of the mountain being so very steep my foot gave way in the snow and did not break the bone. When I looked down and saw the blood and the

and laid me on and started home. When I got to the toll gate at the mouth of the canyon they gave me a drink of cold water. I was still wrapped in snow and the cold water together with the loss of blood nearly cost me my life. It threw me into a chill.

(When they reached a nearby mill, Porter Rockwell poured whiskey and molasses into the wound.) He placed me down before the fire and washed my leg and got a hand full of fine salt and laid it on the bone and lapped the flesh on it in its place and commenced to sew it with silk thread. He put in a few stitches and then his heart failed him. He could not do any more and no one could help me. So they held me up and I sewed it myself. That is, I took the needle through myself and he tied the threads and we made a good job of it. (The leg eventually healed after some frightening episodes of infection. He filed a mission in Canada. In the fall of 1861, his name was called from the pulpit, as assignments were generally issued in those days, to go to southern Utah. He was not present when the call was given.) My neighbors reported that they had heard my name called with others to go South on a mission to make new settlements and raise cotton. I was to start right away. I looked and spat, took off my hat, scratched my head, thought, and said, "All right."



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